

# 'Blank Check: The Pentagon's Black Budget' with author Tim Weiner

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September 18, 1990 I Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize winning Washington correspondent for the Philadelphia Inquirer, discussed his new book, Blank Check: The Pentagon's Black Budget. The work is a historical review and critique of the nation's skyrocketing military spending through the Pentagon's "black" or secret budget. In 1990, this budget reached \$10.3 billion; nine years earlier, it was \$626 million. Mr. Weiner said the secrecy of the military's spending "is primarily to avert criticism and evaluation-- and that is profoundly antidemocratic." He traced the roots and public ignorance of these covert activities back to the Manhattan Project, the World War II crash program to build the atomic bomb. Much of the book's research is drawn from interviews with Richard Garwin, who was involved with developing the hydrogen bomb in the 1950's and served as a presidential adviser and defense consultant for over four decades.

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Tim whiner what is the Pentagon's black budget it's the Pentagon's own term for every program that the Secretary of Defense the director of Central Intelligence or the President of the United States wants to keep off the books wants to keep deleted from the public budget of the Pentagon and kept at a classification of top secret or above these are the secret weapons and the secret policies for compat encode war and World War three and should it come to that world war four who calls it the black budget the Pentagon originated the term the term black comes from the world of espionage and means like a black bag job undercover hidden from light secret when did you first hear the term the term my newspaper sent me down to Washington that is what mr. the Philadelphia Inquirer in April of 1986 and the idea was to get behind some of the stories we've been hearing during the months preceding about the fantastically expensive hardware the thousand-dollar wrenches the \$6,000 coffee pots and so forth I obtained a copy of the budget of the Pentagon and leaf through the sections detailing research and development and procurement programs the budgets for buying new weapons there are blank spaces hundreds of them

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blank spaces hundreds of them where dollar figures should be there were code words or descriptions or names the program should be I began talking to people inside and outside of the Pentagon and they identified this as a problem a problem in a kind of a tug of war between secrecy and democracy I don't mean to over dramatize it but that spring things we're getting out of hand in Washington and you had an atmosphere but secrecy was winning the folks I talked to focused my attention on the black budget and I went to work philadelphia inquirer why were they I mean you have a it's owned by Knight Ridder you have a big Washington bureau why would they send you down to Washington to do something that they're already doing well they weren't and the editor of the newspaper who's sadly left us recently Jean Roberts was very intrigued by the notion it wasn't something that was being directly addressed and he wanted me to dig up as much as I couldn't get it in the paper before I had assembled enough to write about iran-contra broke that fall

and so the context of excessive secrecy was now something that was on the public agenda how long had you been in Philadelphia at the time I started working for The Enquirer in 1982 so most of that time was digging into corruption and HUD programs corruption in the Philadelphia Police Department and I just returned from four months in the Philippines covering the Marcos and Aquino contest where's home originally New York my folks moved to California when I was a teenager they teach at UCLA and they brought me up to love words love books love ideas what do they teach my dad's field is psychosomatic medicine and my mom's is history where'd you go to school Columbia College in New York and then the Graduate School of Journalism at

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the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia when did you go originally to journalism right after your master's degree yep where started out working three jobs simultaneously in New York based in the federal and state courts there down in Foley Square and this is where I learned my love of documents when you interview people as a reporter sometimes they will lie sometimes they will equivocate or shade their speech to suit a private agenda but the document like the lawyers say speaks for itself were you a good student in college pretty good so you like you liked the idea of digging in the stacks for the document that contains the seed of fact is integral to good journalism the idea of coming up with words on paper or facts on file that will give you the underpinnings the historical basis for writing good interpretive analytical work that's started in college that's started in the stacks how old are you 34 now and you've already got two Pulitzer Prizes well a group of us at the Kansas City Times shared a Pulitzer 1982 for uncovering the causes of the Hyatt Hotel disaster that happened the summer of 1981 the collapse of the sky walks in a brand new hotel that killed 114 people so that was a shared one and then these stories that form the basis of blank check we're given the Pulitzer for National reporting in 1988 at 30 that was 32 you're 32 years old and you got a Pulitzer your second Pulitzer does that as that had a what's that do to your head well the best thing that happened was that when my name got in the paper old friends I hadn't heard from in years called me up and that was the best thing

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called me up and that was the best thing that happened I think that you run the danger of ego mania and certainly I'm afflicted with that disease but you have to realize that the symbology of a prize like that you shouldn't confuse what the thing is represents with the meaning of your work I just try to write good stories and get them in the paper okay you're addressing a bunch of college kids and they know you've got two Pulitzer Prize prizes at this age step outside your own body if you can and observe what is it that you have been able to do that's different that got you these prizes in college and in the graduate school I had a few good teachers who put a few basic values into my head and said set a fire burning in my belly the dictums of aya stone and of Lincoln Steffens that one should try and get at the roots of social and political problems with first-hand research and by not believing or at least taking with a large grain of salt the official version of events has always driven me and I think it drives all reporters who keep their eye on the ball a reporter without certain basic values as a stenographer who simply repeats and amplifies the official words of officialdom and that is less than the minimum or at minimum we should be rooting out hidden facts and presenting them to people so they can make their own mind stuff about how their government works you say in your book that a hundred million dollars a day is available to the President of the United

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available to the President of the United States Secretary of Defense the director of CIA and the agencies over which they preside without accountability to the American people that's true this is a system that began when the Cold War took root in this country and one of the ironies of the Cold War as we look back is that our open rambunctious contentious democracy took on a few of the attributes of the sullen and secretive and closed society with which we were at war in the atmosphere of emergency in 1949 1950 the nation decided that it would be best to establish permanent secret agencies in this country for most of which was the CIA

and that the money to run the CIA should be appropriated secretly and should not be questioned in effect that the director of the CIA would get a lump sum of money approved by one or two or three or four members of Congress and that he did not have to account for how that money was spent what this meant in practice was that the agency could hire armies it could buy banks without accounting to anyone in its prosecution of the secret war against the Soviet Union what happened in the 1980s was that the Pentagon began to bury its largest and most expensive weapons technologies under the cover originally designed for the intelligence community two examples that have sort of nosed their way into the light now developed under the black budget of the stealth bomber the nuclear b-2 bomber and a

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bomber the nuclear b-2 bomber and a satellite system called Milstar whose aggregate costs if completed will approach a hundred billion dollars there was an obsession with secrecy that caused the black budget to explode in the early 1980s and it doubled and doubled again to the point where we were by the close of the Reagan administration spending thirty six billion dollars a year or roughly a hundred million dollars a day outside the normal channels of accountability let me ask you the senator did senator Sam Nunn and Congressman les Aspin respective chairmen on each side of the Congress over here know about this black budget absolutely but they couldn't talk about it debate open debate was curtailed on these secret weapons systems and in fact my first week of reporting down in Washington les aspin put out the first public statement on the growth of the black budget back in April of 1986 and he said that secret weapons spending as the Pentagon budget doubled from 1981 to 1985 had gone up Eightfold and that it was to use his term his words grossly excessive and that this was information that ought to be available in a democracy sure Aspen knew what the stealth bomber was gonna cost but he couldn't tell his colleagues nor could the question be debated on the floor how many people in Congress know about the black budget and know know the specifics of the black budget to have an effective overview enough to make intelligent rational decisions at minimum eight are given access to every jot and tittle that they need I mean if you're a junior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee senators you can get it most of it you can get most of it or you could go to none and ask for a briefing

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could go to none and ask for a briefing do they have to testify on Capitol Hill that they want this money to bill the b2 well now they do because a when in the beginnings in the in the beginnings of the stealth bomber program there were four members of Congress who knew what the plane was supposed to cost and the new technical details about it now that now of course itself is into the light and we can see that what we've got is a bomber design for nuclear war against the Soviet Union that is so expensive that you could have built each 70-ton plane out of solid gold and still had enough money left over to mount it on a bed of platinum had open debate been permitted before the stealth bomber started rolling off the production line I think it would have been beneficial for this country okay let's go to the by the way do you live in Washington now yes indeed you get caught by a Potomac fever I don't see myself as part of the Washington community I see myself as a reporter from out of town who is standing aside and observing the workings of government I can think of some of my colleagues who work for Washington institutions like the post who I believe see themselves as kind of the Fourth Estate as part of the workings of government I disagree with that approach so what happens when you welcome to Pentagon today and they see it coming down the hallway nothing do they know who you are no they don't and no one's ever said you know look out boy get back I tend to work from the documents that the Pentagon puts out to use the public record to get it something deeper the public record to

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something deeper the public record to use what's public or what's been declassified taking apart the Pentagon's budget to determine what's black what secret is kind of a reverse engineering for example if you want to know the level of secret spending in the research and development budget you've got a bottom line

let's say it's 50 billion dollars you add up the several thousand unclassified line items and you'll see that there's a 10 billion dollar gap there so you know that 10 billion dollars is being funneled out into secret spending from there you get to a deeper level by interviewing people who have or have had access to this information and doing a great deal of reading as to the nuclear strategy and technological goals that the Pentagon is pursuing I wanted to ask you about a line that popped out of the pages of your book I could be charged with a felony for telling you I thought this is a free country where you can talk about anything in the first in the First Amendment protection there are code word classification levels and the programs discussed in that passage which are for strategic nuclear warfare Olympic bellwether Meridian Bernie in the reign of director Casey at the CIA he threatened more than a few reporters with felony prosecutions under the Espionage statutes for revealing codeword programs I seriously doubt that such a prosecution could be successfully mounted because of the First Amendment protections but there remain statutes on the book the government interprets as protecting code word classified information and they are effective statutes there on the books there there is it scary enough not to publish it no sir no sir I think the First Amendment is stronger in the back under acknowledgments and

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in the back under acknowledgments and you talk about coming to Washington and not being a part of it here but you do thank some people yes and let me read the list and I want you to tell me if you can who they are in Washington I received guidance from Dina Razer mm-hmm and Donna Martin both formerly with the project on military procurement that is the organization that first dug up the raw information on the extraordinary items that the Pentagon was producing such as the coffee pots the wrenches the hammers and they do and have in the past done tremendous cost analysis of how the Pentagon produces its weapons and they have a network of people inside the Pentagon who help them gather information where do they come from they are a privately funded and a political group and they range from cheap Hawks that is people on the right of the spectrum who want the defense dollar spent efficiently to doves who want the defense dollar spent in more Pacific and perhaps and less substantial ways why would anybody want to spend money for that purpose and what kind of money do they get I don't know I think they're independently funded from various organizations like Ord Foundation or maybe Stewart lot I really haven't looked behind their financing but they're respected institutions I don't know you know this but why are they both formerly of that project well let's see Donna went to work for a member of Congress and Dena I believe is now a freelance author did you find them or did they find you oh I went to them and they put me onto some wonderful people inside the Pentagon Ernest Fitzgerald a Ernest Fitzgerald you thank who earn e Fitzgerald one of the Pentagon's most famous and staunchest in-house critics this is the man who in the early 1970s

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this is the man who in the early 1970s was fired upon the order of President Nixon because from his post as a cost analyst inside the Pentagon he identified the first billion-dollar cost overrun in Pentagon history on the c5 cargo plane where is he now he is still inside the Pentagon he was reinstated by order of the federal courts do they watch the kind of people that he talks to I believe under the court order reinstating him he is protected from harassment and he was helpful to you yes what kind of help can he give you the benefit of this is experienced guidance on how to see weapons systems Ernie once explained to a rapt congressional committee that they should see an expensive military aircraft for example the stealth bomber not as a single unit but as a collection of vastly overpriced spare parts flying in tight formation and it is images like that that allow outsiders to gain a greater understanding of how the Pentagon won there's another gentleman here by the name of Thomas Emily Tom Amli has been with the Department of Defense for nearly 40 years he is a highly talented weapons designer he designed the Sidewinder 8 lethally effective air-to-air missile and he is also a skeptic on the subject of black programs my first week in Washington through the good offices of Dino razor I was introduced to Tom Amelie we sat down to the Pentagon cafeteria I asked him about the problem of black programs and he said I'm paraphrasing but he said look there are three reasons for having black programs this is a man with some access to this information one you're doing something that should genuinely be secret there's about five of them and stealth ain't one of them

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stealth ain't one of them - you're doing something so stupid that you don't want anybody to know about it and three you want to rip open the money bag get out a big shovel because there's no accountability for this money and I remember his words vividly is he angry I think Tom Lee is a classic example of a patriot and he does not want the defense dollar squandered on wild-eyed schemes or on impossible missions or on screwball goals he is a man who has spent his adult life dedicated to the defense of this country and what he stands against boondoggles particularly boondoggles protected under a national security shield he's a government employee he is worse for the Air Force would he be allowed under the rules of the Pentagon to come here and do a television program with us sure thing if you asked him about what's black he might have to bite his tongue but he'd be more than happy on this list you have John Pike of the Federation of American scientists why could they be of help to you Pike is an expert in the overhead reconnaissance systems the spy satellites run by an agency called the National Reconnaissance Office which officially does not exist the United States government has never acknowledged its existence and it is forbidden to mention the name of this agency on the floor of the Congress how do you know about it well through people like John Pike and there are good offices in fact what cannot be mentioned on the floor of the Congress can be written about and in fact a journalist and professor named William Burroughs several years ago wrote a very sober and sympathetic book

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wrote a very sober and sympathetic book about the NRO multi black why can you write about it but members of Congress can't speak about it because I thought they had the you know the the right to say anything they wanted on them they shall not not be held accountable right for what they say on the floor brought too long um because the United States government has never acknowledged the existence of the National Reconnaissance Office a member who mentions its name on the floor of the house can be subject to sense you're in fact when congressman Georgi Brown jr. of California dared to question some of the NRO's spending he came within a hair's breadth of official censure he resigned from the House Intelligence Committee this is simply not done how much money do they spend roughly seven to eight billion dollars a year and this stuff needs to be debated let me give you an example why a few weeks back you remember the Hubble Space Telescope a 1.5 billion dollar NASA program experienced some technical difficulties in space well that's a subject of important debate and we need to make sure that such mistakes aren't repeated all right around the same time a 1.3 billion dollar National Reconnaissance Office satellite tumbled out of orbit burned up over Soviet airspace and disintegrated you'll hear no debate about it you won't see any public investigation of that expensive mistake because of the secrecy surrounding the National Reconnaissance Office how much press has there been about it damn little little shirttails how come because public information on the expenditures of public funds or what were public funds and have been hidden under the black umbrella is curtailed what's that term you just used shirttails Oh a shirttail is a little

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shirttails Oh a shirttail is a little additional story of three paragraphs or so at the end of a larger news her story it's sort of an oh by the way in the story are separate half separate little separate sub-headline all right on the list here you have Gordon Adams and Steven Alexis Kane of the defense budget project what do they do for you right around the corner these are folks who have devoted their careers to doing cost analysis of Pentagon programs they're nonpartisan they are working for more efficient spending of the defense dollar and they were expert in Pentagon budgeting processes and they provided me again with the benefit of their experience where do they get their money I believe that again they're funded by nonpartisan foundations what makes them so expert experience where do they get the experience from years of taking apart Pentagon budgets and analyzing them if any of them ever worked inside the Pentagon or do you need to in order to understand this stuff I think it helps and they certainly are in contact with a number of people inside the Pentagon who give them guidance in turn I think what you need is a clear eye a pocket calculator and a sense of history for starters that some others and when I ask you about who they are you paint a picture of a

Pentagon full of people that are on the phone every day to these different groups giving them insider information now doesn't work that way again these folks work as I worked with the public documents of the Pentagon it's not a matter of sort of leaking information that should be classified you simply analyze what's public and proceed to ask questions from there and folks who will give you answers do so

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folks who will give you answers do so not out of a desire to you know spread secrets or do damage certainly to this country certainly not bad of a genuine concern that large sums of money are going down a rat hole and in this instance what I try to focus on in the early chapters of the book are the secret research and development and procurement of nuclear war technologies of the equipment with which to fight and the Pentagon presumes when a nuclear war again your premise is at 36 billion dollars a year in the last three years of the Reagan administration the first year to the Bush administration is being hidden from the American people and spent on weapons in the Defense Department oh and on the intelligence budget what's with a CIA budget every year the CIA's budget is running in the four billion dollar range it is that budget is dwarfed by too much larger and much more expensive intelligence agencies the National Security Agency which conducts electronic eavesdropping around the world and whose budget is in excess of 12 billion dollars a year and the National Reconnaissance Office that we talked about this budget runs in excess of seven eight billion dollars a year in their all-in-all the budget for intelligence is in excess of twenty five billion dollars a year the remainder of the black budget in the ten billion dollar range is for weapons and war technologies how much of that twenty five billion can be seen in a budget in the federal budget sent up by the president any of it not aligned how much of it has ever discussed publicly at the Congress and one way or the a very very little how many members of Congress know about twenty five billion dollars being

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about twenty five billion dollars being spent on intelligence the heads of the Senate Intelligence Committee and of the House Intelligence Committee have a good overview of how that money is spent the junior members generally are in on when they have time for it because these are busy people whatever testimony the folks from the various agencies deliver in closed session isn't that the way democracy is supposed to work in closed session absolutely not public officials elected by the public sent here to do the public's business know this information deal with it in committee but it's because of our concerns about international governments knowing this kind of stuff if they withhold from the public again I do not argue in this book and no one in his right mind would argue that the Constitution demands the disclosure of intelligence sources or methods nor do I argue that the Pentagon should be compelled to disclose technologies that's working on or state-of-the-art designs but the money is supposed to under the scheme devised by the framers of the Constitution be reported to the public with the intelligence budget in the past three different sort of Commission's or investigative bodies have looked at this question the Rockefeller Commission set up by President Ford in the wake of CIA abuses being disclosed the Senate Intelligence Committee and the Church Committee that looked into various abuses of secret spending in the 70s all concluded that the disclosure of a lump sum an aggregate sum for the National Intelligence budget would a not harm national security and be is the kind of information that ought to be available in an open democracy when it comes to weapons systems the line items for individual weapons systems that is surely information that ought to be available to us and les aspin who's

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available to us and les aspin who's hardly a wild-eyed leftist is on record as agreeing with that you say he's a hardly a wild I had left us he's a Democrat from Wisconsin true that doesn't make him some sort of radical I said he's hardly a wild-eyed left it's these he's this is a man who is in the mainstream of American politics les aspin used to work in the Pentagon I believe he did as a matter of fact worked for Secretary of Defense McNamara in 60s he's an economist by profession the man knows the value of a defense dollar you've got some more people want to ask you but you're the last three Jeffrey Richardson Richardson was Jeff Mason

sure and Steve gull stir of the National Security Archive now this is a fascinating depository of declassified documents that's an invaluable resource to researchers in Washington again set up excuse me with foundation money it functions for example say I get several thousand pages of declassified documents through the Freedom of Information Act I after plundering them for whatever information I want can give them to the National Security Archive and then other researchers and historians and reporters have access to those papers and what the archive does is in effect collate and index the declassified documents of the government in a way that really is unique it will be of great value to future historians of this era who pays the bill for the National Security Archive again they received funding from organizations like although I'm not positive the Ford Foundation Stewart Mott sort of good government

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Mott sort of good government philanthropies and what's the expertise of the three people of Steve Golf sir Jeff niacin and Jeffrey Richardson archivists indexers researchers Richardson is has been a professor of government at American University and has written in half a dozen excellent books on the structure and history of American intelligence agencies what do you say to the critics on the right that are gonna read that list they just another list of liberals anti-military anti-big government groups that are feeding Tim whiner this information first of all the information they're feeding me and helping me interpret are the records of the government all right there's no spin on this my approach to the problem of secret spending is that the Constitution calls for a full accounting of how the government spends our tax money and that the black budgets growth and scope is a challenge to that promise I believe that we have under the veil of excessive secrecy squandered a great deal of our national treasure on weaponry that will prove useless and on foreign policy schemes such as the iran-contra affair that have shamed our nation and that in the tug of war between secrecy and democracy that we need a little tug back towards openness here's the dedication page to Herbert and Dora with love my parents who taught me to love words and ideas and language what do they think of all the stuff that you're involved in mmm they're proud

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you're involved in mmm they're proud they're proud I mean they write books too and it was my mother who's a historian by profession who first inculcated me with the value of digging up documents there's a I've got the New York Times from Sunday right actually this is being taped so this is Sunday September the let me find it here so that those people don't like to get these sixteenths I believe you're right 1636 billion worth of secrets reviewed by Lawrence Korb who used to be an assistant secretary of defense now at the Brookings right mr. Reiner does an excellent job of describing the history of the creation of the black budget and pointing out the abuses that can occur when public disclosure is limited blank checks should be read for that reason alone so far so good then he says however in too many places he undermines the impact of his thesis with his simplistic analysis example he treats all the abuses of the black budget equally a group of army Colonels spending black budget money on hookers personal trips and four-star hotels is hardly a threat to our national security and not on a par with the iran-contra affair yet both episodes get equal treatment well with due respect to mr. Corp I tried to delineate a difference in the book between the violation of law and the violation of army regulations in the first instance and a challenge to the Constitution of the United States and the second interest of it in the in the second in incidents the iran-contra affair I tried to make that delineation clear and I'm sorry if I didn't make it clear enough for him by the way how much money is being spent for hookers and for stock oh well this is this is this was a case in which the US Army tried to create a kind

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which the US Army tried to create a kind of a hard-charging prog aid of secret soldiers that was going to be a kind of a hybrid of the Green Beret in the CIA and what happened was that this cadre gained of access to unauthorized funds 324 million dollars worth before they were shut down and you had a situation this is based on records released through the Freedom of Information Act of the Army's own investigation of this affair you had soldiers in mufti running around with suitcases filled with cash kind of running their own

agenda and the Secretary of the army from 1981-89 Shaun Marsh characterized the affair as the precursor of the Iran-Contra affair. I certainly don't mean to give the impression that the violations of laws and army regulations these gentlemen were court-martialed in secret. Why were they court-martialed in secret because their existence was supposed to be a secret. It was the first secret court-martials courts-martial. I'm sorry since Vietnam in almost 20 years I did not mean to convey the impression that their violation of federal law and army regulations was equal to or greater than the constitutional challenges that Iran-Contra presented. What I did mean to present and the Secretary of the army in that era John Marsh says so himself as I quote him in my book I did mean to present this incident as a precursor to the Iran-Contra affair. One other line I want to ask you about in Lawrence Corb's review by the way what do you think is really I thought he was generous in places I think that he has every right

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places I think that he has every right to disagree with my analysis. I think that he is a wise gentleman and that his experience in the Pentagon may color his perception of my book. Mr. Whiner mixes up so many questions in his book it will have less impact than his articles. Well if it had an equal impact to my articles and who was awarded the kind of recognition the articles would I be shocked myself. I think that well first of all I disagree that I've conflated questions of law or constitutionality or of government secrecy in this book. Mr. Korb seems to suggest in his review that he concedes for example yes too much is classified yes there were too many blank checks in the Reagan administration yes there needs to be greater disclosure of what the government classifies the secret what he seems to want is a kind of a convivial consensus between the executive and the legislative branches of government that will allow just the right amount of secrecy to protect our national security and would that that could happen but it does not it is not the case there is and will continue to be a struggle between the desire of the executive branch to increase its powers under the national security vision first framed in the early days of the Cold War and the desire of elected representatives for greater disclosure. This is what makes democracy a wonderful

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this is what makes democracy a wonderful dogfight. It's this continuing tug of war the vision of comity that will allow just the right amount of secrecy out that Mr. Corbin's vision is not the way things are. You wrote your newspaper articles in '88 they were published in '87 in 87 mm-hmm you now have a book in 1990 right you said you got a couple of prizes one out of this particular one the poster prize has there been any other tangible result on that you know I hope so and I would not attribute it to my articles back in '87 but to a slew of other reporting by a cadre of reporters and to the Iran-Contra investigation itself. I think that we go through cycles of corruption and reform in this country and that what happened when the Iran-Contra affair fell apart was that we saw and this was the conclusion of the majority report of the Iran-Contra committees that I believe their phrase was a cabal of zealots had stolen a great deal of political power in this country and they attributed their theft of that constitutional power to excessive secrecy. Um I think that that was an accurate analysis and I think that now has we begin by consensus to push some of these weapons programs into the light to examine them for what they are that an intelligent result will occur but you cannot argue about stuff that's

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cannot argue about stuff that's classified at the level that the stealth bomber was you cannot debate it and so decisions get made without sufficient information programs tend to perpetuate themselves without informed debate. How much of all of what you're talking about in the black budget should be kept secret no matter what intelligence sources and methods you don't want for example to know that a head of state is on the CIA's payroll are there many well in the 70s Jordan's King Hussein was on the CIA's payroll that's been publicly acknowledged by the United States government. Um you don't want to disclose the ways in which intelligence is gathered because that will cut off the flow of the intelligence what you need to do given the economic trouble we find ourselves in in this country is to make intelligent choices of how we spend our money and we

cannot write a blank check to the Pentagon or to the intelligence agencies there has to be some level of informed debate about the level of spending secret weapons and secret programs soak up in this country let me give you an example I'm able to write about we're able to discuss the stealth bomber because it's been partly Declassified after ten years of secret research and development now we have at this hour as we speak on the 18th of September a serious serious need for defense strength in the Persian Gulf the stealth bomber designed for nuclear war against the Soviet Union is so expensive that one of them would support

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expensive that one of them would support an entire division of troops in the Saudi desert for a year you've got to have which cost how much 900 million dollars you've got to be able to make intelligent choices we're going around the world with our hat in our hand seeking money from foreign governments to support this mission because we have dedicated so much of our treasure so much of our brainpower to these highly costly dubiously valued nuclear war technologies we can now because of its declassification debate whether we need a stealth bomber but there are a hundred other nuclear war technologies buried in the black budget about which there can be no debate a hundred others related nuclear war technologies give us an example well one that's just peeking its nose out into the light is the Milstar satellite system which I write about at length and blank check well lay before you explain that when was the last word written for this book the afterword was rewritten in May of 1990 and previous to that when did you stop write in the book about a year ago the fall of 1989 and I made minor revisions for clarity and as an updates while the book was being edited by the publishers why did it take so long to get a book out it always takes nine months from the from the submission of a manuscript or it traditionally takes nine months from the submission of a manuscript to the appearance of a book anybody ever tell you why I heard that so often what's the 9-month thing it beats me it's a baffling process perhaps it goes back to the gestation of a fetus in the womb we'll come back to the mil star just a second this book is published by warner books threat at 2195 correct if you could have would you have changed anything in here

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would you have changed anything in here after what happened over in the Gulf did that have any impact then I mean other words I'm getting at people go by this book today it'll be out of date in any way oh no I don't think so um the the weapon systems that I discussed in the book our weapon systems geared for a full-tilt nuclear war against the Soviet Union those weapon systems still exist they're still in the budget we continue to build them as if the events of the last 18 months had never happened Congress as we speak is weighing the value of these programs but I believe that the information is fresh and the events of the last six weeks and the Persian Gulf in no way alter the facts or the conclusions I'm sorry Milstar okay a classic example of a military system developed under the black budget it's now just been Declassified enough so that we can discuss it intelligently Milstar is an acronym it's short for the military strategic tactical and relay system imagine the network as a constellation of eight to ten satellites in space in geosynchronous orbit twenty-two thousand three hundred miles from Earth linked by three to four thousand ground stations on earth kind of computer terminals broadcast dishes the purpose of Milstar is to enable the survivors of the National Command Authority the president and his top military aides the survivors of the first days and weeks of a nuclear war to continue to broadcast the go codes and launch orders for the firing of nuclear weaponry after the Pentagon after the White House after Washington after strategic American Air Command headquarters in Omaha are destroyed Milstar would weave together our fragmented forces so that the war envisioned could continue in the

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the war envisioned could continue in the United States would emerge victorious a six-month nuclear war that was the design requirement under which Milstar was built and its cost once you include the cost of the rockets to launch the satellites and the various reconfigurations of the electronic network will be somewhere in the 30 to 40 billion dollar range why is it becoming public because it is so expensive that it's very difficult

to hide in the black budget the request for next year's appropriation is more than a billion dollars - it has to be sold because it is controversial because it is tremendously expensive it has to be sold in the political marketplace it has to be sold to Congress as a whole this was the case with the Strategic Defense initiative Star Wars Star Wars was largely kept out of the black world although some of its component parts are very highly classified because it was so radical a notion that it had to be sold in the political marketplace this is why many people the Pentagon don't like black programs because you can't talk about him he can't sell them and it's it's a nimac 'el - good science to have compartmentalization of different parts of a very complicated military program to have the people working on different aspects of it kept from talking to one another former President James Madison former Supreme Court justice Joseph Story former Supreme Court justice Hugo Black former President Dwight Eisenhower Lord Acton all of these people are quoted throughout your book are you sure you're not a political scientist rather than a journalist you never took a political science course in my life why do you love to read why let me see if I can find it in the opening pages here you use a quote from Hugo Black the guarding of military and diplomatic secrets at the expense of inform representative government provides no real security for our Republic the

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real security for our Republic the United States Supreme Court justice Hugo Black from Alabama who was also a senator why did you quote it I couldn't agree with him more first of all I say second of all that statement comes from one of the great confrontations in our constitutional history between the government and the press was the Pentagon Papers case and the Supreme Court ruled precisely as justice Black said that if you're going to set up a balancing test between the guarding of official secrets and the functioning of an informed representative government you got to give more weight to public information and I think failure to follow that dictate gets this nation into trouble I forgot to mention one world famous philosopher Bill Richards hi why he oh he gets a whole chapter chapter 9 he gets the bulk of the last chapter of the book why Bill Richardson is a delightful man now in his 70s and a true patriot who became the focus of one of the most interesting in one of the least known Supreme Court cases of the 1970s bill served this country in World War two and in the Korean War he served in various military intelligence and communications capacities the man loves this country he knows the value of secret intelligence one day in 1967 he picked up his morning paper and read that the CIA was funding student groups subsidizing trade unions in this country bill knows how the CIA is supposed to work and bill knows his Constitution and he thought correctly that the CIA was violating its charter

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that the CIA was violating its charter bill picked up put down the newspaper and sat down to his typewriter and wrote a letter to the secretary of the Treasury to the Department of the Treasury to the Bureau of the budget and said I believe that I have a right as a citizen a taxpayer and a voter to know how my money is being spent and I'd like to see a copy of the CIA's budget they wrote back to him and said mr. Richardson we don't have it he after extended correspondence went down to the federal courthouse in Pittsburgh near where he lived and filed a very well drawn up lawsuit against the federal government seeking the information he believed he had a right to have he was opposed in court by the then United States Attorney in western Pennsylvania Richard Thornberg now the Attorney General of the United States in the district court he lost he appealed he went to the federal appeals court and he won the appeals court sitting on bank meaning every sitting justice in the appeals court heard the case because it addressed a heretofore unresolved question of federal law what appeals court again that's the Third Circuit sitting in Philadelphia they said that Richardson did have the right to this information and that the Constitution promised it to him and that he as a citizen and a voter in a tax payer had the absolute right to seek the information promised him that decision came down in 1971 when government secrecy in this country was at its zenith and government deception in this country was at its height that deception eventually resulted in the resignation of the president the government sat up and took judicial notice of mr. Richardson's victory in the appeals court and appealed a decision it went to the Supreme Court in 1973 Robert Bork was then the Solicitor General the case the decision in the

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General the case the decision in the case came down in 74 right before Richard Nixon's resignation Richardson lost five to four just Chief Justice burger writing the majority opinion said look the United States is not an Athenian democracy it is not a New England town meeting and we don't have to listen to every Tom Dick and Harry with a constitutional beef Justice Douglas in a fiery dissent said Richardson has the right to this information and by denying it to him by a five to four vote we give a new imprimatur to government secrecy to excessive government see in many ways I wrote this book for William Richardson where is he today he's living in Greensburg Pennsylvania and what's he doing he's reading he's in retirement he's 72 I guess and he is continuing to think about the issues that he raised long ago for every famous victory in the Supreme Court there are a hundred people like Bill Richardson how'd you find him by knowing the case how'd you know the case it's a classic in the confrontation between excessive secrecy and the democracy promised by the Constitution our guest the last hour has been the author of this book blank check the Pentagon's black budget his name is Tim whiner and he works for the Philadelphia Inquirer and is based here in Washington it's been a pleasure thank you thank you sir

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